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ABSTRACT

This paper summarizes responses of students in kindergarten and grades 1, 2, 4, and 5 to questions about Native Americans. The paper draws on findings from two studies, both done in a suburban school system deemed "average" on a variety of educational and socioeconomic indicators. In each study, samples of students stratified by gender and achievement level were interviewed individually about topics addressed in social studies. Analyses focused not just on the accuracy of responses, but on their qualitative nuances that provided insights into students' ideas, including their misconceptions. Responses across grades K-5 suggest that students' knowledge and thinking about Native Americans tends to proceed through the following stages: (1) no knowledge; (2) cartoon stereotypes of the appearance or behavior of Indians; (3) Indians as the first people in America, wilderness survivors, and teachers of and learners from the Pilgrims and other early Europeans; (4) knowledge about Indians' lives and cultures and empathy with them as noble ecologists and victims of European aggression and greed; and (5) distancing and loss of empathy as attention shifts to the pioneers and the westward expansion of the United States. Implications for planning curriculum and instruction for elementary social studies are discussed with recommendations for classroom teachers and curriculum planners. (EH)

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DEVELOPMENTS IN ELEMENTARY STUDENTS' KNOWLEDGE ABOUT AND EMPATHY WITH NATIVE AMERICANS

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Possessing information about students' prior knowledge makes it possible to plan instruction that both builds on students' valid ideas and addresses their misconceptions. Scholars interested in history teaching and learning have begun to develop such information about students' historical learning. Much of this research has focused on the secondary grades, but several teams of investigators have studied elementary students (Barton, 1997; Barton & Levstik, 1996; Brophy & VanSledright, 1997; McKeown & Beck, 1994). This work has shown, for example, that much of the historical knowledge of fifth graders is organized in narrative form, so that it tends to features stories focused around a few hero figures rather than less personalized causal analyses of historical trends. The students' narratives also tend to compress time and space by depicting face-to-face interactions between people whose life spans did not overlap (e.g., Columbus and the Pilgrims).

So far, little information has been collected about developments across the elementary grades in students' knowledge and thinking about particular historical topics. This article breaks ground in this area by summarizing responses of students in kindergarten and Grades 1, 2, 4, and 5 to questions about Native Americans. It draws on findings from two studies, both done in a suburban school system selected because its primarily lower-middle/working class families are near the national average on a variety of educational and socioeconomic indicators and because its social studies curriculum features the expanding communities sequence that is used in most U.S. elementary schools. In each study, samples of students stratified by gender and achievement level were interviewed individually about topics addressed in social studies. Most questions were open-ended and followed up with probing designed to elicit extended statements of students' knowledge and thinking. Analyses focused not just on the accuracy of responses, but on their qualitative nuances that provided insights into the students' ideas, including their misconceptions.

Students were interviewed twice (before and after a unit) about topics addressed at their grade level, but interviewed just once for other topics. This article draws on the preunit interviews (from grades in which units on Native Americans were taught) and the one-time-only

interviews (for the other grades), because its focus is on long-term trends in knowledge development rather than on the short-term effects of a given instructional unit (for the latter information on fifth-grade U.S. history units, see Brophy & VanSledright, 1997).

Students in Grades K-4 were asked about "Indians" rather than about "Native Americans," because all students were familiar with the former term but most were ignorant of or confused about the meaning of the latter term. Fifth graders usually were asked about "Native Americans," because their teacher had explained to them that this was another term for American Indians (preferable because the name "Indians" was mistakenly introduced by Columbus, who thought that he had reached the Indies). However, interviewers also used the terms "Native American Indians" or simply "Indians" with fifth graders who seemed confused about the meaning of "Native Americans."

Somewhat different sets of questions were used at different grade levels, but there was enough commonality to allow comparisons across grades on several dimensions. These findings are summarized in Tables 1 and 2.

Previous Findings

Two previous studies indicated that preschool and kindergarten children growing up in the contemporary United States tend to develop negatively stereotyped images of Native Americans. Ramsey, Holbrook, Johnson, and O'Toole (1992) found that four-year-olds possessed cartoon-like (and partly cartoon-based) stereotypes of Indians, whom they depicted as wearing feathers or headdresses and often wielding tomahawks or engaging in acts of violence. These children also thought that Indians lived only in the past. A month-long curriculum on traditional and contemporary Native American life was effective in increasing the accuracy of their images of Native Americans, although some children did not realize that the "Native Americans" discussed in the unit were the same people as the "Indians" that they had heard about in other contexts. These children retained the negative stereotype of "Indians" alongside their newly acquired and more positive image of "Native Americans."

A League of Women Voters (1975) study found that three-fourths of the kindergarten children interviewed described Indians as wearing feathers or animal skins, hunting with bows and arrows, or living in tepees. Twenty percent described them as mean and hostile, likely to kill or shoot people. These children also saw Indians as far removed from themselves in both time and space. Fifth graders interviewed in the same study provided much more realistic views, although they focused more on the past than the present and tended to describe the plains tribes' characteristics as typical of Indians in general.

Trends Across Grades K-5

The findings from our studies help fill in the picture of how students progress from the negative and stereotyped views that they bring to school in kindergarten to the more realistic and empathetic views that they express as fifth graders. Changes in response patterns across Grades K-5 suggest that students' knowledge and thinking about Native Americans tends to proceed through the following stages:

1. No knowledge
2. Cartoon stereotypes of the appearance or behavior of Indians (tipis, bows and arrows, warlike tendencies)
3. Indians as the first people in America, wilderness survivors, and teachers of and learners from the Pilgrims and other early-arriving Europeans
4. Knowledge about Indians' lives and cultures and empathy with them as noble ecologists and victims of European aggression and greed
5. Distancing and loss of empathy as attention shifts to the pioneers and the westward expansion of the U.S.

Findings from the early grades indicate that contemporary American children still enter school with cartoon stereotypes of Indians picked up through exposure to television and other media. Even though "westerns" have faded in prominence as TV and movie fare, children still acquire the Plains Indians stereotype through cartoons, Disney movies, and other sources.

When asked what they knew about Indians, kindergarten students almost exclusively characterized Indians as bad, mean, or warlike people or described them as war-whooping, dancing around campfires, hunting with bows and arrows, or attacking people with axes ("They are bad and they don't like people," "The bad Indians kill people and the good Indians want to kill the bad Indians," "They do wars and are bad," "They sit on the ground in a circle," "They have bows and arrows," "They make a sound by putting their hand over their mouth," "They dance around a fire," and "They put ropes around people"--the last statement by a child who had recently seen the movie Peter Pan).

This warlike stereotype persisted in about half of the first graders, although now it often was embedded within story lines involving Indians as enemies of Pilgrims, soldiers, or cowboys, particularly in conflicts over land ("The cowboys and the Indians were mean to each other 'cause they didn't want no one on their state."). In addition or instead, however, first graders began to emphasize that Indians lived under primitive conditions (they had to live in the woods, hunt and fish for food, wear clothes that they made themselves, etc.). Most first graders had begun to think about Indians as people rather than as cartoon stereotypes, but they did not so much empathize with them as pity them because they had to lead such difficult lives.

Some of the kindergarten and first grade students not only stereotyped Indians but spoke as if "Indians" were qualitatively different from "people." Comments included: "Real people don't like Indians mostly," "They come out when it is dark," and "I knew he was an Indian because people couldn't do that."

Second graders showed that they had been influenced by instruction about Columbus, the First Thanksgiving, and Michigan Indians, as well as by exposure to children's literature. Stereotypes of Indians as bad, mean, or warlike had virtually disappeared, and responses focused on tipis and other homes, feathered headdresses and other clothing, hunting or fishing for meat, growing vegetables, picking berries, or arts and crafts (making clothes and shoes, making bracelets, painting designs on tipis). There was some mention of Indians

teaching wilderness survival skills to the Pilgrims, but most discussion of encounters with Europeans pictured the Europeans as cultural infusers and the Indians as imitators or learners. For example, about half of the second graders said that Indians originally lived in tipis but switched to log cabins once they learned about them from Europeans.

Second graders tended to express neither pity nor empathy for Indians. Instead, they described them matter-of-factly as primitive people who adopted European ways once exposed to them.

Second graders also appeared to be in the midst of a shift from a cultural to a genetic definition of Indians. Almost all of the kindergarten and first-grade students believed that Indians became extinct, that no full-blooded Indians exist anymore, or that if such people exist, they are not Indians (i.e., because Indians were people from the past who were mean, etc.). One kindergartner said that Columbus had killed all of the Indians. Another said that Indians couldn't have children because "they were all boys." In contrast, more than half of the second graders knew or guessed that many Indians are still alive today, and heavy majorities of the fourth and fifth graders possessed this knowledge.

Fourth graders showed the effects of units and books on Indian life. None stereotyped Indians negatively and only a few mentioned interactions with Europeans (trading with them, defending against their encroachments). Most of the fourth graders' responses focused on everyday Indian life: living in tipis or longhouses, hunting and fishing for meat, growing vegetables and picking berries. Late in the school year, these students were exposed to a unit on tribes indigenous to the area as part of their study of Michigan history. Carry-over effects from this unit were obvious in the fifth-grade interviews.

The fifth-graders' responses resembled those of fourth graders in focusing on tipis and longhouses, hunting and fishing, and growing and gathering. However, the fifth graders described these activities in much more detail and elaborated with reference to making clothing or moccasins, telling legends, and other aspects of Indian culture.

In drawing contrasts between Indians and European immigrants, fourth and fifth graders expressed empathy with Indians, in two respects. First, many of these students had picked up the "noble ecologist" idealization of Indians, describing them as killing only what they needed, sharing food with other tribe members, and showing concern for one another and for the physical environment ("The Indians used everything . . . if they had a deer, then they would use everything on the buck. The Europeans would use what they needed and throw the rest away. The Europeans were wasteful."). Second, many of these students depicted Indians as victimized by imperialistic and greedy Europeans who mistreated both people and the environment ("The Indians wanted to be friends. They didn't want to hurt your feelings, but the Europeans wanted to get the furs and take the land away from the Native Americans. The Europeans wanted to hate and steal the land. The Indians just wanted to be friends.").

Trends Within Fifth Grade

As they began fifth grade, students were both quite knowledgeable about and quite empathetic toward Indians. Furthermore, the fifth graders were taught a unit on Native Americans that included description of the lives and cultures of five tribal groups located in different parts of North America. Responses to the postunit interview indicated that this unit further developed their knowledge about Indian lives and cultures and deepened their empathy with Indians as people. Glimpses of this knowledge and empathy appeared in responses to subsequent interviews about the exploration, discovery, and early colonization years. Instruction about these events included emphasis on ways in which Indians were mistreated by Europeans and ways in which Indians helped Europeans by teaching them wilderness survival skills.

However, after reaching a peak around the middle of the fifth grade, the students' knowledge about Indians was put into abeyance and their empathy with Indians began to dwindle. These changes began with the unit on the American Revolution, which shifted attention from events in North America in general to a focus on the English colonists. As

students learned about the problems that the colonists experienced with the French, the Indians, and later the British, the colonists gradually became "us" and the people with whom they came into conflict gradually became "them." This identification tendency gathered momentum as students went on to learn about the pioneers traveling over the mountains and "settling" the west, and so on. From this point onward, in both the textbook and the teacher's explanations and story telling, the pioneers were the heroes of the stories. Except for the brief appearance of Sacajawea, Indians disappeared or were mentioned only as faceless impediments to western expansion.

Discussion

The findings are discussed with reference to four aspects of planning curriculum and instruction for elementary social studies: (1) how teaching about Native Americans in Grades K-5 might be improved by retaining its positive elements but eliminating its negative ones, (2) how empathy with Native Americans might be sustained as the study of U.S. history progresses in fifth grade and beyond, (3) the potential advantages and pitfalls involved in using children's literature as data sources for historical study, and (4) the value of eliciting students' ideas about the topics of instruction.

The social studies curriculum experienced by these students was effective in eliminating cartoon stereotypes of Indians and establishing a base of knowledge that was reasonably accurate (from both historical and cultural perspectives). By the time they completed their Native Americans unit as fifth graders, the students had acquired considerable knowledge about Native Americans, and this knowledge had become both more differentiated and better organized (around the notion of five main tribal groups who lived in different parts of the continent and had contrasting customs). Even the minority who were still operating with the stereotype of Native Americans as living in tipis and hunting buffalo had learned that this image fit the Plains tribes much better than it did the other four tribal groups. Students who already understood that there were different tribal groups with different customs had learned

much more about the similarities and differences among the groups and could use the notion of five main groups as a way to organize their knowledge.

The most obvious development and solidification of knowledge occurred with respect to the Eastern Woodlands tribes, about whom the students entered the unit with the most prior knowledge (from earlier studies of Michigan Indians). The process of comparing and contrasting the different tribal groups helped students to develop a better understanding of the implications of saying that the Eastern Woodlands tribes were farmers who raised crops on good farmland and hunted in game-rich forests. Most indicated appreciation of the fact that life conditions were much more difficult for the Plains tribes than for the Eastern Woodlands tribes, and some were aware of the geographical reasons for this.

In many respects, the students also showed a great deal of the kind of empathy that Dickenson and Lee (1984) have stressed as important for providing a basis for understanding people from the past in their own terms. Most had learned to see the details of Native Americans' lives and customs as sensible adaptations to their times and environments, and had come to view Native Americans with empathetic understanding or even romanticized adulation.

Native American religious beliefs and customs were the major exception to this pattern of positive views. Apparently these had not been explained in terms that would allow the students to relate them to their own religious beliefs and customs, so they seemed strange or pointless. The students did not make connections between the Native Americans' pantheistic practices and modern monotheistic practices such as blessings of crops or prayers of supplication or thanksgiving (e.g., for good weather or a good harvest).

Both before and after the Native American unit, and before and after the subsequent unit on European exploration, the fifth graders had difficulty with questions about what the Europeans and the Native Americans, respectively, brought to the Encounter. Through their fourth-grade unit on Michigan history and especially their fifth-grade unit on Native Americans, these students had come to view Native Americans with a degree of empathy and a good

deal of respect. They praised them for their inventiveness and accumulated wisdom in learning how to get food through farming, hunting, and fishing and how to fashion homes, clothing, and tools from natural materials. Many students even had acquired romanticized stereotypes of Native Americans as people with a finely tuned ecological consciousness who never wasted anything or as peace-loving and generous people who got along well and cooperated with one another.

The students did not have richly detailed images of the Europeans of the times, however, and many elements of the images that they did have were negative ones. Some stereotyped the Europeans as greedy and otherwise immoral people who practiced slavery, confiscated other people's valuables, and murdered anyone who tried to stop them. These students had difficulty in identifying similarities between the two groups. They had much less difficulty in identifying differences, but the differences they stated tended to reflect the stereotypes described above. The students had not yet learned much about, nor come to appreciate the implications of, the cultural exchanges that changed both the Old World and the New World in so many ways as a result of the Encounter (see Brophy & VanSledright, 1997, for a detailed presentation of the fifth-grade interview data).

These findings suggest the value of helping students to appreciate the Encounter in ways that do not either romanticize or demonize either group. Egan (1988) and others, noting children's responsiveness to stories that feature romantic elements such as heroes fighting for good against evil, have argued that the elementary curriculum should emphasize such stories, including not only conventional history rendered in story form but also myths, folk tales, and history-based fiction. Traditional applications of this approach to "the age of exploration" have featured Washington Irving's version of a heroic Columbus sailing westward to fulfill his dreams, keeping his head when all about him were becoming hysterical with fear of sailing over the edge of the flat earth. More recent romantic versions have emphasized the scourges visited upon gentle, nature-loving Native Americans by evil, greedy European conquerors.

Such stories are interesting and memorable, but they encourage the development of misconceptions about the Encounter. They ought to be replaced, or at least balanced, by more realistic treatments that reflect what is known about the motives and the information available to the historical actors in question, without either heroizing or demonizing them. Guidelines published by the National Council for the Social Studies (1992), along with instructional materials developed in connection with the Columbian Quincentenary (Davis & Hawke, 1992; Wooster, 1992), provide a good start in this direction.

The traditional elementary social studies curriculum apparently is effective in developing both knowledge about and empathy with Native Americans up until about the middle of fifth grade. After that, however, Native Americans tend to disappear from the curriculum or to be treated in ways likely to reduce empathy. As attention focuses more and more exclusively on the colonies, the pioneers, and westward expansion of the new nation, Native Americans tend to appear primarily as faceless impediments to the pioneers' agendas, rather than as fully developed characters with agendas of their own.

A desirable addition to the curriculum would be periodic updates about the experiences of Native Americans as the United States expanded westward. At a minimum, this would include reminders that the settlers were taking over lands occupied by Native Americans, who were forced to keep retreating ahead of an advancing frontier if they wanted to maintain their traditional ways of living. A more complete version would inform students about how different tribal groups responded to these pressures, about federal policies and the establishment of reservations, and about key events such as the Ghost Dance Movement and the Trail of Tears. It is not clear how much of this information should be included in the curriculum for the elementary grades (vs. saved for eighth- or eleventh-grade U.S. history courses), but it seems important at least to keep students aware of the fact that Native Americans were resisting invasion of the lands they occupied, not just attacking settlers because they were unpredictable or hostile people.

A third issue is the use of children's literature as part of the content base for teaching history. Historically based literature offers several advantages over traditional textbooks. Well-written stories, especially stories of adventure or heroism that capture the imagination, tend to stick in children's minds. Compared with more analytic approaches, the story approach is more interesting to students and the narrative format makes it easier for them to remember connected elements of information. The narrative mode seems well suited both to history as subject matter and to children as learners.

However, the narrative mode of representation of history, and children's fiction in particular, need to be used judiciously. Reliance on these resources can lead to distorted understandings if students are not clear about the distinctions between historical accounts and fictional recreations, or if they are exposed to fictional selections that are not historically accurate (Levstik, 1989, 1993; VanSledright & Brophy, 1992). For example, the fifth graders we studied were taught about the Wilderness Trail and the initial migration over the Appalachians using selections from children's literature that focused on the pioneers' hardships. These selections brought to life the difficulties involved in crossing the mountains and the many ways in which families had to be self-sufficient. The pioneers were heroized in these stories, and the Native Americans, if not actually demonized, were treated as faceless "hostiles" against whom the pioneers had to protect themselves.

Even when adequate in historical accuracy, children's literature is problematic as a content source if it focuses attention on particular examples or even trivial incidents instead of more powerful concepts or generalizations. In teaching these fifth graders about the Lewis and Clark expedition, for example, the teacher relied primarily on the book Bird Woman and Flaming Hair (Thorne, 1968) rather than on relevant material from the textbook. As a result, many students did not remember much more about this expedition than that it involved the adventures of people named Flaming Hair, Long Knife, and Bird Woman (the names for Clark, Lewis, and Sacajawea used in the book).

These findings suggest two implications about the use of children's literature in teaching history. First, when using narrative sources to create memorable images of historical events, be sure to fill in gaps in students' understandings and establish a "bigger picture" perspective within which to situate the discrete occurrences depicted in narratives. Elementary students can understand general chronological sequences (e.g., that land transportation developed from walking to horse-drawn carriages to engine-powered vehicles), even though they may have difficulty mapping these advances onto timelines or keeping track of particular dates. Fifth graders, for example, can benefit from clear explanations, supported by periodic reminders, concerning broad themes or developmental trends (e.g., progression from nomadic hunting and gathering societies, to stable but small farming communities, to the rise of towns as centers of commerce and culture, to federations and nations); the fact that life in Europe during the 15th and 16th centuries was modern in many respects but lacked engine-powered transportation, electronic communications, etc.; and key aspects of the European nations' economic agendas and rivalries (the importance of trade, the search for better routes to the Far East, and the establishment of colonies). Supported by references to simplified maps and timelines, such contextual information helps students to construct more coherent accounts of developments across time from their study of history (Brophy & VanSledright, 1997).

Second, the collection of children's literature used as source material should include stories that convey the points of view of Native Americans (and later African-Americans, Mexicans, Chinese, etc. in other contexts). Exposure to such stories broadens students' understanding of U.S. history by expanding their purviews. Furthermore, the personalized treatments of the stories' hero figures help students to develop and maintain empathy with Native Americans as people. Many (although not all) children's literature selections dealing with Native Americans not only offer engaging stories but also embed these stories within historical contexts that are portrayed accurately and provide useful extensions of history instruction. The NCSS bulletin on teaching about Native Americans (Harvey, Harjo, &

Jackson, 1997) contains many useful suggestions in this regard, as does an ERIC digest by Reese (1996).

In summary, contemporary elementary social studies teaching appears to be relatively effective in helping students to discard negative stereotypes of Native Americans and replace them with networks of mostly accurate information. By making some relatively minor improvements, teachers should be able to optimize students' historical knowledge and empathy, in ways that do not either romanticize or demonize any of the groups represented. These adjustments would involve (1) retaining the positive elements of the traditional curriculum (e.g., studying the lives and cultures of selected Native American tribal groups viewed in their own right and from their own points of view, not just in the context of their interactions with Europeans), (2) making changes or additions where needed (e.g., making sure that the points of view of Native Americans do not just disappear once attention begins to focus on the development of the United States as a nation), and (3) being both more selective (for historical accuracy) and more inclusive (of multiple points of view) in identifying children's literature selections to use as sources for historical content.

Finally, it is worth noting that, in teaching about history or any other social studies subject, there is value in taking time to elicit students' ideas before, during, and following instruction. This can be done with the class as a whole or with selected individuals, informally or through structured methods such as K-W-L (Ogle, 1986), using activities that call for either oral or written response (although oral responses to open-ended questions provide the most useful insights into students' knowledge and thinking). When conducted prior to the unit, such questioning provides information about students' existing knowledge and misconceptions. During the unit, it helps teachers to make sure that the students have grasped key ideas and elicits additional misconceptions that may need attention. Following the unit, it generates vital assessment information (more indicative of the extent and nature of students' understandings than the minimal responses generated by tests that require only matching, circling, or filling in blanks). Questions that call for explanations of the reasons for

or implications of historical events are especially useful, because they elicit indications of the degree to which students can connect what they learned about the events to larger historical trends and themes. For more about the generation and use of such assessment data in teaching elementary social studies, see Brophy and Alleman (1996).

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Table 1. What Elementary Students Said They Knew About Indians

	Kdg	1st	2nd	4th	5th
	N = 8				N = 10
Stereotypical Traits and Activities					
Bad, mean, warlike	3	2	0	0	0
Good Indians and bad Indians	1	1	0	0	0
Had wars with other Indians or whites	1	2	2	0	2
Had to defend themselves against whites	0	0	0	1	1
War whoops	1	1	0	0	0
Campfires, dancing	3	1	0	0	0
Feathered headdresses, sparse clothing	0	2	4	0	1
Bows and arrows, axes	2	3	1	1	2
Housing					
Tipi	0	5	6	8	9
Longhouse, stick-and-straw construction	0	2	0	5	8
Log cabin	0	1	5	3	1
Food					
Hunt, fish for meat	2	8	7	7	10
Grow vegetables; pick berries	0	2	5	7	9
Killed only what they needed	0	1	0	0	1
Shared food with other tribe members	0	0	0	0	2
Other Activities					
Made own clothes	0	1	1	1	1
Made own shoes/moccasins	0	0	1	0	1

Hard life, constant work	0	1	0	0	1
Got guns, beds, clothes, etc. from Pilgrims/settlers	0	0	1	1	1
Taught wilderness survival skills to Pilgrims	0	0	1	0	1
Painted designs on tipis	0	0	1	1	0

Additional comments made by individual students:

First grade: Made bracelets, had to drink yucky water

Second grade: Rode horses, stole horses from cowboys

Fifth grade: Not as greedy as whites, cheated by whites, told legends, men ate before women, and "on TV they said that Indians chopped off the white men's scalps and then put it on their belts . . . just for victory, I guess, plus the white men were stealing their land."

Table 2. Responses to More Specific Questions About Indians.

	Kdg	1st	2nd	4th	5th
	N = 8				N = 10
Who Were the First People to Live in America?					
No response or childish guess	7	5	1	0	1
Cavemen	0	1	0	0	0
Pilgrims	0	1	0	0	2
Indians and Pilgrims	0	0	0	0	2
Indians	1	1	7	8	5
Why Did Some the Indian Tribes Pack Up and Move Periodically?					
Don't know/no response	5	- *	4	1	0
Didn't like where they were living, wanted change	3	-	1	1	0
Wanted to discover new lands	0	-	2	0	0
Wanted to live in a nicer climate	0	-	1	1	0
Pushed out by whites	0	-	0	2	3
To secure better land, more plentiful game	0	-	0	3	7
Are There Any Indians Still Around Today?					
No	6	5	2	0	1
Don't know	1	0	1	0	1
Probably/maybe	0	0	3	2	2
Yes	1	3	2	6	6

* This question was not asked of the first graders.